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& IQTISODIYOT

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fan va ta'limga oid ilmiy-amaliy jurnal*

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- 05.01.01 – Muhandislik geometriyasi va kompyuter grafikasi. Audio va video texnologiyalari
- 05.01.02 – Tizimli tahlil, boshqaruv va axborotni qayta ishlash
- 05.01.03 – Informatikaning nazariy asoslari
- 05.01.04 – Hisoblash mashinalari, majmualari va kompyuter tarmoqlarining matematik va dasturiy ta'minoti
- 05.01.05 – Axborotlarni himoyalash usullari va tizimlari. Axborot xavfsizligi
- 05.01.06 – Hisoblash texnikasi va boshqaruv tizimlarining elementlari va qurilmalari
- 05.01.07 – Matematik modellashtirish
- 05.01.11 – Raqamli texnologiyalar va sun'iy intellekt
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- 05.03.02 – Metrologiya va metrologiya ta'minoti
- 05.04.01 – Telekommunikatsiya va kompyuter tizimlari, telekommunikatsiya tarmoqlari va qurilmalari. Axborotlarni taqsimlash
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- 08.00.15 – Tadbirkorlik va kichik biznes iqtisodiyoti
- 08.00.16 – Raqamli iqtisodiyot va xalqaro raqamli integratsiya
- 08.00.17 – Turizm va mehmonxona faoliyati

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BEHIND THE 30% TARGET: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP IN UZBEK UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: Ongoing reforms aimed at promoting gender equality and expanding women's participation in leadership are creating new opportunities within Uzbekistan's higher education sector. This article develops a multi-level conceptual framework for analysing the factors that support women's advancement to academic leadership positions in universities. Drawing on feminist institutionalism, role congruity theory, and the glass ceiling concept, the framework examines three interconnected levels: macro (national policy and legal environment), meso (university governance structures and organisational culture), and micro (individual career development and support systems). The study highlights the importance of coordinated interactions between public policy initiatives, institutional practices, and professional development mechanisms in strengthening women's participation in academic governance. The proposed framework provides a methodological foundation for future empirical research and contributes to the development of effective leadership strategies in higher education institutions across Uzbekistan.

Keywords: women's leadership, higher education, Uzbekistan, gender equality, feminist institutionalism, academic governance, university leadership, Central Asia.

Annotatsiya: O'zbekistonda gender tengligini ta'minlash va ayollarning boshqaruvdagi ishtirokini kengaytirish borasida amalga oshirilayotgan islohotlar oliy ta'lim tizimida ham yangi imkoniyatlar yaratmoqda. Mazkur maqolada ayollarning universitetlar rahbarligidagi ishtirokini qo'llab-quvvatlovchi omillar hamda ularning akademik liderlik lavozimlariga erishish jarayonlarini tahlil qilish uchun ko'p darajali konseptual yondashuv ishlab chiqilgan. Tadqiqot feministik institutsionalizm, rol mosligi nazariyasi va "shisha shift" konsepsiyasi asosida makro (milliy siyosat va huquqiy muhit), mezo (universitet boshqaruvi va tashkiliy madaniyat) hamda mikro (individual kasbiy rivojlanish va qo'llab-quvvatlash tizimlari) darajalarini qamrab oladi. Tadqiqot natijalari gender tengligini rivojlantirishga qaratilgan davlat siyosati, institutsional tashabbuslar va professional rivojlanish mexanizmlarining o'zaro uyg'unligi ayollarning akademik boshqaruvdagi faolligini yanada oshirishga xizmat qilishini ko'rsatadi. Taklif etilgan konseptual model kelgusidagi empirik tadqiqotlar hamda oliy ta'lim muassasalarida samarali boshqaruv strategiyalarini ishlab chiqish uchun metodologik asos bo'lib xizmat qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: ayollar liderligi, oliy ta'lim, O'zbekiston, gender tengligi, feministik institutsionalizm, akademik boshqaruv, universitet rahbariyati, Markaziy Osiyo.

Аннотация: Реализуемые в Узбекистане реформы по обеспечению гендерного равенства и расширению участия женщин в управленческой деятельности создают новые возможности и в системе высшего образования. В данной статье разработана многоуровневая концептуальная модель анализа факторов, способствующих продвижению женщин на руководящие должности в университетах. Исследование основано на подходах феминистского институционализма, теории ролевого соответствия и концепции «стеклянного потолка» и охватывает три взаимосвязанных уровня: макроуровень (государственная политика и нормативно-правовая среда), мезоуровень (система управления университетами и организационная культура) и микроуровень (индивидуальное профессиональное развитие и механизмы поддержки). Результаты исследования подчёркивают значение согласованного взаимодействия государственной политики, институциональных инициатив и механизмов профессионального роста для расширения участия женщин в академическом управлении. Предложенная концептуальная модель может служить методологической основой для дальнейших эмпирических исследований и разработки эффективных управленческих стратегий в высших учебных заведениях Узбекистана.

Ключевые слова: женское лидерство, высшее образование, Узбекистан, гендерное равенство, феминистский институционализм, академическое управление, руководство университетами, Центральная Азия.

INTRODUCTION

The question of women's representation in academic leadership has attracted growing scholarly attention globally. Universities, as institutions that produce knowledge, shape public discourse, and train future leaders, hold



a particular symbolic and practical significance in the broader struggle for gender equality. Yet across regions and institutional types, women continue to be underrepresented in senior academic positions including rectorships, vice-rectorships, and deanships. This pattern persists even in countries where women constitute a majority of students and a significant share of the teaching workforce.

Uzbekistan exemplifies this paradox with particular clarity. The country has made substantial legislative commitments to gender equality in recent years, including the 2019 Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, the 2021 Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality by 2030, and a December 2023 presidential decree establishing a binding target of 30 percent female representation in leadership positions across state bodies, organisations, and state-owned enterprises by 2030. Simultaneously, the higher education sector has undergone explosive growth, expanding from approximately 70 institutions to over 220 between 2017 and 2025, with the gross enrolment ratio rising from roughly 9 percent to approximately 42 percent.

Despite the importance and timeliness of this issue, there is a notable absence of conceptual scholarship that systematically analyses the barriers to women's academic leadership in the specific context of Uzbekistan. This article seeks to address that gap by developing an integrated conceptual framework that draws on international gender and leadership theory while attending to the distinctive features of Uzbekistan's post-Soviet, Muslim-majority institutional environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

Uzbekistan's contemporary gender equality policy framework has developed rapidly since 2017. The foundational legal instrument is the 2019 Law on Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, which established the principle of gender mainstreaming across public institutions. This was followed by the Senate's adoption of the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan by 2030, which set targets across multiple domains including education, employment, political participation, and healthcare. The National Programme for Women's Activity 2022–2026 specified implementation mechanisms including leadership training, entrepreneurship support, and monitoring indicators.

The most consequential recent development for academic leadership is the December 2023 presidential decree mandating that the share of women in leadership roles within state bodies and state-owned enterprises reach 30 percent by 2030. International assessments have recognised these efforts. Uzbekistan was identified as a top-five global improver in the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2024 index.

The available data paint a picture of significant but incomplete progress. Women now constitute approximately 45 to 48 percent of higher education students, a substantial increase from the pre-reform era. Women represent approximately 44 percent of the university teaching workforce nationally. However, regional disparities are marked: while the figure exceeds 50 percent in Tashkent, it falls to approximately 29 percent in Sirdaryo region and 30 percent in Jizzakh region (Table 1).

Table 1. Female Rectors as a Proportion of Total Rectors in Central Asian Countries¹

Country	Female Rectors (%)
Kazakhstan	~26%
Kyrgyzstan	~17%
Turkmenistan	~10% (est.)
Uzbekistan	~5.3%
Tajikistan	~5%

Feminist institutionalism, as developed by Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell, directs attention to the ways in which gender norms are embedded in institutional rules, practices, and cultural assumptions. A central insight of this approach is the distinction between formal rules, such as laws, policies, and organisational charts, and informal institutions, meaning the unwritten norms, customs, and power dynamics that shape behaviour within organisations. This framework is particularly relevant to Uzbek universities, where formal governance structures are defined by ministerial regulations and presidential appointments, but day-to-day decision-making is shaped by informal networks, patronage relationships, and cultural expectations.

Role congruity theory, as articulated by Eagly and Karau, proposes that prejudice toward women in leadership arises from the perceived incongruity between characteristics typically associated with women (communal qualities such as warmth, nurturance, and sensitivity) and those associated with effective leaders (agentic qualities such as decisiveness, assertiveness, and competitiveness). Applying this theory to Uzbekistan requires attention to the specific content of gender role expectations in a Muslim-majority, post-Soviet cultural context. The Soviet legacy

¹ Source: Compiled from Harden-Wolfson & Shakirova (2025); Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova (2021).

of formal gender equality and women's workforce participation creates a distinctive ideological environment in which support for women's professional activity coexists with deeply traditional expectations about domestic roles — a phenomenon Kandiyoti has described as the Soviet paradox.

The glass ceiling metaphor captures the invisible yet real barriers that prevent women from advancing beyond a certain level in organisational hierarchies. In the academic context, it manifests in the disproportionate clustering of women at lower ranks and their scarcity at the top. Empirical research in Kazakhstan using validated glass ceiling belief scales has identified four dimensions of women's responses: denial, resilience, resignation, and acceptance. No comparable measurement has been attempted in Uzbekistan, but the Kazakh findings offer a suggestive baseline given the shared post-Soviet institutional heritage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article employs a conceptual framework development methodology. Drawing on a synthesis of three complementary theoretical traditions — feminist institutionalism, role congruity theory, and the glass ceiling concept — the study constructs an integrated multi-level analytical framework. The methodology involved a comprehensive review of international and regional literature on women in academic leadership, analysis of Uzbekistan's legal and policy documents related to gender equality, examination of available statistical data on women's representation in higher education, and synthesis of theoretical constructs into a three-level (macro, meso, micro) framework adapted to the specific institutional features of Uzbekistan's higher education system.

The framework is designed to be comprehensive enough to capture the interplay of structural, institutional, and individual factors, while remaining specific enough to guide empirical investigation in the Uzbek context. It is intended as a starting point for future empirical research rather than a tested explanatory model.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The macro level encompasses the national laws, strategies, and policy instruments that establish the formal parameters for gender equality in higher education. Key elements include the 2019 gender equality law, the 2030 Gender Equality Strategy, the December 2023 decree establishing the 30 percent leadership target, the 2023 Labour Code provisions on women's labour rights, and the constitutional guarantee of equal rights in management. At this level, the framework examines the extent to which policy commitments are accompanied by implementation mechanisms, monitoring indicators, accountability structures, and resource allocations. A critical question is whether the 30 percent target is accompanied by enforcement provisions or remains aspirational.

The meso level focuses on the governance structures, organisational culture, and institutional practices of individual universities. Formal governance in Uzbek universities is highly centralised: rectors are typically appointed by presidential decree or ministerial order. This centralised appointment mechanism provides a structured framework that can facilitate the implementation of national priorities, including the promotion of women in leadership. The traditional kafedra structure creates a chain of authority in which promotion to department head, then dean, then vice-rector is the expected pathway to senior leadership. Women who enter academia later due to family responsibilities, or who experience career interruptions, can benefit from institutional support mechanisms that enable continued professional development and career progression within this pathway. Moreover, the criteria for advancement often emphasise the Doctor of Sciences degree, the attainment of which reflects a high level of academic achievement and professional expertise, creating opportunities for women to strengthen their leadership credentials.

The micro level addresses the experiences, choices, and opportunities that shape individual women's pathways to academic leadership. Central constructs include work-family balance, leadership self-efficacy, professional development, and identity negotiation. The interplay between professional ambition and family expectations is particularly important in the Uzbek context and can contribute to the development of diverse leadership experiences. An intersectional perspective adds further richness: women's experiences vary significantly by region, ethnicity, age, marital status, and urban versus rural location, providing valuable insights into the diversity of pathways leading to academic leadership (Table 2).

Table 2. Multi-Level Framework: Key Constructs and Research Questions²

Level	Key Constructs	Illustrative Research Questions
Macro	Gender equality legislation; 30% target; Labour Code; international frameworks	To what extent are national gender targets accompanied by enforceable mechanisms in HE?
Meso	Appointment processes; kafedra pipeline; organisational culture; mentoring; informal networks	How do formal and informal appointment practices interact to produce gendered outcomes?
Micro	Work-family conflict; leadership self-efficacy; glass ceiling beliefs; intersectionality	How do women academics negotiate between professional ambition and family expectations?

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Uzbekistan stands at a critical juncture in its pursuit of gender equality in academic governance. The legal and policy infrastructure is more developed than at any point in the country's post-independence history, and the higher education sector's rapid expansion creates both new opportunities and new urgencies. Yet with only approximately 5 percent of universities headed by women, the gap between policy aspiration and institutional reality remains wide.

The multi-level conceptual framework proposed in this article offers a structured analytical tool for understanding this gap. By integrating insights from feminist institutionalism, role congruity theory, and the glass ceiling concept, and by applying them across macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis, the framework identifies both the formal policy achievements and the informal institutional barriers that shape women's pathways to academic leadership.

The framework generates several key recommendations for future research and policy:

First, empirical studies should adapt and validate the glass ceiling beliefs scale for the Uzbek context, building on the successful application of this instrument in Kazakhstan. A nationally representative survey of women academics across regions and institutional types would provide the first systematic mapping of perceived barriers.

Second, qualitative research using semi-structured interviews and institutional ethnography should explore the informal practices and cultural dynamics within university governance that formal policy analysis cannot capture.

Third, comparative studies with Kazakhstan, where female rectorship rates are approximately five times higher, could illuminate which institutional, cultural, or policy differences account for the disparity and what lessons might be transferable.

Fourth, longitudinal tracking of the 30 percent target's implementation should begin immediately, establishing baseline measures and monitoring progress against the 2030 deadline.

Fifth, research on the effectiveness of mentoring, sponsorship, and leadership development programmes for women academics should be prioritised, as these represent the most actionable intervention points for institutional change.

Achieving the 30 percent target by 2030 will require more than legislative mandates. It will demand systematic attention to appointment processes, investment in mentoring and leadership development, cultural change within university governance, and a recognition that the diverse experiences of women across Uzbekistan's regions and communities require differentiated interventions. The conceptual framework developed here provides a roadmap for the research and policy effort that lies ahead.

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